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TAMMANY HALL AND THE DEMOCRACY.

BY THE HON. RICHARD CROKER.

No political party can with reason expect to obtain power, or to maintain itself in power, unless it be efficiently organized. Between the aggressive forces of two similar groups of ideas, one entertained by a knot of theorists, the other enunciated by a well-compacted organization, there is such a difference as exists between a mob and a military battalion. The mob is fickle, bold, and timid by turns, and even in different portions it is at the same time swayed by conflicting emotions. In fact, it is a mere creature of emotion, while the drilled and compacted battalion is animated and supported by purpose and scientific plan. It has leaders, and these leaders are known to every man in the ranks and possess their confidence. It is thus that a single company of infantry is able to quell almost any popular outbreak in a city; and a regiment is completely master of the situation, even if it be outnumbered by the malcontents in the proportion of ten or twenty to one.

The value of organization in the case of political parties does not appear so obviously upon the surface ; but in point of fact organization is one of the main factors of success, and without it there can be no enduring result. In the immense republic of the United States, which is really a congress or union of over forty separate republics, each having its interests more or less dissociated from those of the others, and yet acknowledging the bond of a common political interest, the organization of a national party must, to a large extent, be based upon a system of deferential compromise, and be an aggregation. The Democrat of New York and the Democrat of Iowa are agreed on certain fundamental doctrines, and in order to put these in action they

forbear to press the acceptance of ideas as to which they are at variance. They only vote for the same candidate once in four years ; at other elections they choose Governors, Representatives, etc., who are at liberty to entertain widely different views as to the extent to which certain political theories should be made to operate. Thus an *ultra* tariff-reformer from Nebraska and a very mild tariff-reformer from some redeemed district of Pennsylvania or Massachusetts may each be an excellent Democrat at home ; and they may vote harmoniously as Congressmen on national questions ; but the two are not as strong and effective as if they were both members of some political club with one watchword and one purpose.

No great army ever has the cohesive power of a regiment. The larger the mass the less perfectly do its members know the habits and purposes of its leader, having no close personal contact with him ; but in the regiment, which is the unit and type of military strength, every private knows his captain and his colonel as well. In the course of service he sees all his comrades and officers in array ; he sees the officers advance and salute the commander and that salute returned, and thus experiences the spirit and purpose that animate the entire body. This feeling of common purpose is the supreme aim of military organization in the direction of effectiveness ; and a compacted and select political club or society is governed by the same processes.

It does not detract at all from the truth of this statement, that local political organizations composed largely of depraved men of revolutionary tendencies have often been powerful engines in government. It rather proves the essential verity of the principle, and indicates the necessity of a sound political basis. Cavalry is an important and powerful factor in war, whether it consist of a horde of Scythian robbers following some incarnate fiend of strife, or of a gallant "Six Hundred" charging down some Valley of Death in obedience to a mistaken order and led by a fearless and trained leader. When we consider the ghastly turmoil of the French Revolution, we cannot fail to admire the success, the influence, the resistless power of the Jacobin Club, not because the club was praiseworthy, since its actions were abhorrent, but because it was skilfully organized and handled. When its representatives sat in the convention, they knew their orders, and they were also conscious that it was their business to

carry them out. They acted upon the principle that obedience to orders is the first duty of the soldier, and that "politics is war." Chess is war ; business is war ; the rivalry of students and of athletes is war. Everything is war in which men strive for mastery and power as against other men, and this is one of the essential conditions of progress.

The city of New York to-day contains a political organization which, in respect of age, skilful management, unity of purpose, devotion to correct principles, public usefulness, and, finally, success, has no superior, and, in my opinion, no equal, in political affairs the world over. I mean the *Tammany Democracy*. I do not propose to defend the Tammany organization ; neither do I propose to defend sunrise as an exhibition of celestial mechanics, nor a democratic form of government as an illustration of human liberty at its best. In the campaign of 1891 almost the only argument used by the Republicans against the Democrats was the assertion that Flower was the candidate of a corrupt political club, and that club was named Tammany. Tammany was accused of every vice and crime known to Republican orators ; it was a fountain-head of corruption ; it was because of it that every farmer throughout the State could not at once pay off his mortgages ; it took forty millions annually from the citizens of New York and gave them nothing in exchange for it. To the credit of the Democrats let us note the fact that, while this torrent of abuse was being poured upon the heads of voters, Democrats did as the inhabitants of Spain are said to do when the clouds are opened,—“they let it rain.” Nobody apologized for the misdeeds of the alleged malefactor ; the Democrats went before the people on legitimate issues, and the result of the affair was expressed in the figures, 47,937 majority. I doubt if the Democracy would have fared anything like as well if they had defended or apologized or explained away. “He who excuses himself accuses himself” is a time-worn proverb. They let Mr. Fassett shout himself hoarse over “Tammany corruption,” and they won the victory.

In fact, such a defensive attitude would have been wholly at variance with the basis on which the Tammany Democracy acts. A well-organized political club is made for the purpose of aggressive warfare. It must move, and it must always move forward against its enemies. If it makes mistakes, it leaves them behind

and goes ahead. If it is encumbered by useless baggage or half-hearted or traitorous camp-followers, it cuts them off and goes ahead. While it does not claim to be exempt from error, it does claim to be always aiming at success by proper and lawful methods, and to have the good of the general community always in view as its end of effort. Such an organization has no time or place for apologies or excuses; and to indulge in them would hazard its existence and certainly destroy its usefulness.

The city and county of New York comprise a population of nearly two millions and furnish the business arena for near-by residents who represent two millions more. The political party, then, that is uppermost in New York legislates locally for the largest municipal constituency on the planet, except one. The task is clearly one of enormous magnitude, and demands a combination of skill, enterprise, knowledge, resolution, and what is known as "executive ability," which cannot be at once made to order, and cannot be furnished by any body of theorists, no matter how full may be their pockets or how righteous may be their intentions. Since the Whig party went out of existence the Democrats have administered the affairs of New York County, rarely even losing the mayoralty except on personal grounds; always having the majority in the Board of Alderman, and as a rule the Sheriff's and County Clerk's offices. And at the same time the guiding force of the New York Democracy has proceeded from the Tammany organization.

As one of the members of this organization, I simply do what all its members are ready to do as occasion offers, and that is, to stand by its principles and affirm its record. We assert, to begin with, that its system is admirable in theory and works excellently well in practice. There are now twenty-four Assembly districts in the county, which are represented in an Executive Committee by one member from each district, whose duty it is to oversee all political movements in his district, from the sessions of the primaries down to the final counting of the ballots after the election polls are closed. This member of the Executive Committee is a citizen of repute, always a man of ability and good executive training. If he were not, he could not be permitted to take or hold the place. If he goes to sleep or commits overt acts that shock public morality, he is compelled to resign. Such casualties rarely occur, because they are not the natural growth of the sys-

tem of selection which the organization practices; but when Tammany discovers a diseased growth in her organism, it is a matter of record that she does not hesitate at its extirpation.

Coincident with the plan that all the Assembly districts shall be thoroughly looked after by experienced leaders who are in close touch with the central committees, is the development of the doctrine that the laborer is worthy of his hire; in other words, that good work is worth paying for, and in order that it may be good must be paid for. The affairs of a vast community are to be administered. Skilful men must administer them. These men must be compensated. The principle is precisely the same as that which governs the workings of a railway, or a bank, or a factory; and it is an illustration of the operation of sophistries and unsound moralities, so much in vogue among our closet reformers, that any persons who have outgrown the kindergarten should shut their eyes to this obvious truth. Now, since there must be officials, and since these officials must be paid, and well paid, in order to insure able and constant service, why should they not be selected from the membership of the society that organizes the victories of the dominant party?

In my opinion, to ask this question is to answer it. And I add that the statement made by the enemies of Tammany that "Tammany stands by its friends," is, in fact, praise, although intended for abuse. Tammany *does* stand by its friends, and it always will until some such change occurs in human affairs as will make it praiseworthy and beneficial that a man or an association should stand by his or its enemies. We are willing to admit that the logical result of this principle of action would be that all the employees of the city government, from the Mayor to the porter who makes the fire in his office, should be members of the Tammany organization. This would not be to their discredit. And if any one of them commits a malfeasance, he is just as responsible to the *people* as though he were lifted bodily out of the "Union League" or some transient "Citizens' Reform Association," and he will at once find himself outside of the Tammany membership also.

Fearfully and wonderfully made are the tales that are sent out into the rural districts touching the evil effects of "Tammany rule." The trembling countryman on arriving in New York expects to fall into a quagmire of muddy streets, and while

struggling through these quicksands he fears the bunco man on one side and the sandbagger on the other. Reaching some hotel, he counts on being murdered in his bed unless he double-lock his door. That his landlord should swindle him is a foregone conclusion. And when no adventure happens, and he reaches home in safety, he points to himself, among his neighbors, as a rare specimen of a survival of the dangers that accompany the sway of a Democratic majority in New York.

The facts are that New York is a centre to which the criminal element of the entire country gravitates, simply because it offers at once a lucrative field for crime and a safe hiding-place. Therefore, to preserve social order and "keep the peace" in New York demands more ability and more policemen than are required in country solitudes. It is safe to say that any right-minded citizen who attends to his own affairs and keeps proper company and proper hours is as safe in New York as in any part of the globe, the most violently Republican township of St. Lawrence County not excepted. Our streets are clean and are in good order as to the paving, except where certain corporations tear them up and keep their rents gaping. Our city is well watered, well lighted, and well parked. It is conceded that we have the best police and fire departments in the world. Our docks are being rapidly improved, and will compare, when completed, with the Liverpool and London docks. Our tax-rate is lower than that of dozens of other American cities whose affairs are not nearly so well administered. Nor is the tax-rate low because the assessed values are high. If any real-estate owner claims that his property is overvalued, you can silence him at once by offering to buy it at the valuation. Practical real-estate owners know that the county of New York does *not* over assess its property-owners.

That the Tammany Hall Democracy will largely aid in organizing victory for the national ticket next November is beyond question. The national Democracy is free to choose whatever candidate it may prefer. Tammany has no desire to dictate or control the choice; its part in the conflict is to elect the candidate after he shall have been named. No matter what Republican majorities may come down to the Harlem River from the interior of the State, we propose to meet and drown them with eighty-five thousand majority from New York and Kings.

RICHARD CROKER.